Growing
TOGETHER
FARMING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Reaping the fruits of change

British Columbia's agriculture industry is adopting new technologies and business models to stay competitive

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B.C. greenhouses are now using hydroponics and cutting-edge computer technology to improve production.

Treadmill effect

[illegible]

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> *There has increasingly been a move away from some of the traditional farming methods to greenhouse farming. We now use the latest technology, comparable to the best anywhere in the world.*
>
> **Sarah Ryall, Gipaanda Greenhouses**

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Novel business concepts

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Shellfish initiative taps input from local government

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If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: **Barron Carswell**, *Acting Manager, Aquaculture Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 250 356-2237, e-mail: barron.carswell@gems8.gov.bc.ca*

Reaping the fruits of change

– Continued from page 1 –

The transition that agriculture is going through brings challenges, to be sure, but it also offers unique opportunities for growth for those adequately prepared to embrace it.

Thomson says educating producers as well as the public will go a long way in helping them respond appropriately to some of these technological and marketing challenges.

"If agriculture is to thrive in the new global economy, producers and governments will have to be much more aware of what other countries are doing and adapt accordingly," Thomson says. "Local governments, through their local planning processes, have an important role to play in supporting agriculture."

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Dave Sands, Regional Director, South Coastal, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3074, e-mail: david.sands@gems8.gov.bc.ca

Summerhill Winery has increased sales through an agritourism strategy that allows visitors to tour its vineyards and scenic setting.

Goodwill ambassador

Agricultural science major spends summer promoting dialogue between blueberry farmers and neighbours

University of British Columbia student Bal Khosa spent his vacation working on a goodwill project to build bridges of communication between blueberry farmers who use noise devices for bird control and their neighbours.

This summer, Khosa responded to more than 50 phone complaints he received, arranging meetings between residents in Delta, Surrey, Abbotsford and other parts of the Lower Mainland and blueberry farmers.

The project, an initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, was challenging, but the agricultural science major says the issues were quite familiar to him.

"My dad has a blueberry farm in Abbotsford and we had dealt with the same kind of complaints before," said Khosa. "It was also an asset that I could communicate with many of the farmers who only speak Punjabi."

> *We had a complaint from a neighbour in Delta who lived about a kilometre from the farm and who said he had no idea what the noise devices were even being used for. So when he came down to the farm and actually saw the birds and how much pressure the farmer was going through, it helped him get a better understanding of the situation.*
>
> ***Bal Khosa, project coordinator***

Bal Khosa helped create a better understanding of blueberry farming practices.

Though most of the cases involved complaints against farmers by nearby residents unhappy with the noise or timing of the noise devices, Khosa says he has on occasion also helped smooth relations between fellow farmers.

In one case in Surrey, a farmer who was building a $2 million horse barn next to a blueberry farm appeared to be set on a collision course with the blueberry farmer because of the effect the devices would have had on the horses.

"We set up a meeting and introduced the two farmers and they reached a compromise that the horses would be kept towards the other side of the farm during the day," said Khosa. "The blueberry farmer also agreed to have the horses walked through his farm."

In the same way, helping the non-farming community understand farmers' problems better by convening a meeting between the two sides has sometimes led to the lessening of differences.

"One of the best strategies is getting the farmer and the neighbour together," said Khosa. "We had a complaint from a neighbour in Delta who lived about a kilometre from the farm and who said he had no idea what the noise devices were even being used for. So when he came down to the farm and actually saw the birds and how much pressure the farmer was going through, it helped him get a better understanding of the situation."

Before heading back to school, the first-year student also put together a fact sheet to provide answers to questions the public may have on the use of noise devices to control bird predation. The information is posted on the ministry's Web site: www.gov.bc.ca/agf

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (John van Dongen, Minister) has asked staff to compile a report on the public concerns received this season regarding noise devices to help develop a strategy before the 2002 crop year.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Bert van Dalfsen, Mechanization Engineer, Resource Management Branch, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3109, e-mail: bert.vandalfsen@gems4.gov.bc.ca

Farm Practices Board makes mediation key goal

Over the past five years, the Farm Practices Board has focused on amicable resolution of conflicts through mediation. In doing so, it has worked hard at balancing the interests of legitimate agricultural practices with those of the non-farming community.

Ross Husdon, president of the board, says that since its establishment in 1996 under the Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act, the tribunal has been implementing a proactive strategy to address the issues that fall under its mandate.

"The board members have been very active in dealing with complaints before they are actually filed in some cases," Husdon said. "In other cases, we've managed to resolve them before they get to the stage of formal hearing, through mediation and consultation work with the parties."

Issues that cannot be decided through mediation are heard before the board's panel, which determines whether or not the farm activity in question is acceptable as normal farming practice. Though the board has no policing powers, it does follow up on resolved issues to see how the parties are faring.

The board has worked on issues of noise, dust, odour, electronic interference and traffic that related to farming activities. It has also attended to complaints related to water usage.

Communities that have benefited from the board's work include Abbotsford, Surrey, Saanich, Oliver, Summerland, Langley, Duncan, Vernon, Chilliwack and Kelowna.

The Farm Practices Board is responsible for resolving local disputes regarding odour, noise, dust or other disturbances associated with farm practices.

Husdon said the time needed to resolve an issue varies depending on the circumstances, but in critical cases the Farm Practices Board has expedited the process to avoid court action. There is no one-for-all formula for handling complaints because different facts have to be taken into account with each case.

"In the case of farmers using noise devices to scare birds from berry crops, we could decide in one instance that a farmer can only have two noise devices and they must be placed at a certain point because of neighbours," said Husdon.

"We may go to a farmer 10 miles away and say they can have four and they can be placed somewhere else, because of surrounding topography, number of neighbours or whatever the case may be."

Though the decision or varying considerations of each case may differ, the aim of arriving at a just resolution remains the same. Husdon says potentially costly and divisive litigation has been avoided as a result.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Jim Collins, Manager, Dispute Resolution Services, Farm Practices Board, phone: 250 356-1817, e-mail: jim.collins@gems8.gov.bc.ca

Did you know?

Valentine's Day is an important day for B.C.'s floriculture industry – B.C. markets 18,000,000 roses annually!

Local governments – a focus on agriculture

Delta mediation underway, Kelowna aims to develop farm bylaws and Peace River starts a major rural plan update

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Corporation of Delta

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[illegible]

City of Kelowna

[illegible]

[illegible]

Peace River Regional District

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

A granary in Peace River, where 35% of farm receipts are generated from grain and oil seed production.

Township of Langley

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[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Regional District of Comox Strathcona

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] **Regional District of Central Kootenay** [illegible]

[illegible] **City of Penticton** [illegible] **City of Abbotsford** [illegible]

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Barry Smith, Senior Land Use Specialist, Resource Management Branch, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3106, e-mail: barry.smith@gems4.gov.bc.ca

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Richmond's Agricultural Viability Strategy – a model of partnership

How municipal, provincial and federal collaboration helped create a blueprint for agricultural development

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Richmond's agricultural strategy will help facilitate harmonious development across the city's agricultural and urban landscape.

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Phases of Development

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If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Dave Melnychuk, Regional Agrologist, Fraser Valley, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3048, e-mail: dave.melnychuk@gems7.gov.bc.ca

Surrey committee strengthens agricultural agenda

Members have different interests but share common cause to enhance industry

The success that the City of Surrey's Agricultural Advisory Committee has had in putting farming issues on the front burner of local government politics shows the potential these types of committees have to contribute to agricultural development in their municipalities.

Surrey's committee faces many of the same challenges as other British Columbia communities, including how best to balance urban development against the needs of the agricultural sector and how to actively encourage agriculture and agriculture-related industries in the area.

The committee's nine voting and four non-voting members represent different interests – agricultural, environmental and municipal – but these have not overshadowed their collective purpose to enhance agriculture in Surrey.

"[illegible] opposing interests have never been a problem," says Marvin Hunt, City Council representative on the committee. "Everyone at the table is looking from their perspective, but we all have the same goal and the goal is to promote agriculture and the use of our farmlands, which keeps us very focused."

A third of the land in Surrey is within the Agricultural Land Reserve and helps generate over $100 million in annual gross farm receipts.

Agricultural plan

Surrey's agricultural plan is a testament to this cooperation. The committee played a key coordinating role in the whole process from the hiring of consultants to the laying out of the terms of reference to the actual implementation of the final product.

The plan addresses a wide range of issues including soil quality, marketing strategies, how to attract agriculture-related businesses and processing of agricultural produce.

"I think the committee's role in the development of Surrey's agricultural plan is a major accomplishment," said Hunt. "Cities often think of development plans, social plans, parks and recreation plans, but few think of having an agricultural plan."

At the heart of the Agricultural Advisory Committee's mandate is a commitment to ensuring that the voice of farmers is heard in the chambers of city hall. With some 740 registered farmers in a city with an estimated population of 360,000, the committee helps make sure that the needs of farmers and the agricultural sector are not ignored.

The committee makes room for a maximum of five farming representatives chosen from nominations by the Surrey Farmers' Institute and a maximum of two representatives from other agricultural sectors such as processing and distribution.

The non-voting members also include a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and the Land Reserve Commission.

Local governments with Agricultural Advisory Committees

Throughout British Columbia, several local governments have appointed Agricultural Advisory Committees to provide a strong link with their farm and ranching communities and advise councils and regional boards on agricultural issues.

These include:

- City of Abbotsford
- Regional District of Alberni-Clayoquot
- Regional District of Central Kootenay
  - Creston Valley
  - Electoral Areas I & J (Castlegar Area)
  - Electoral Area E (Blewett Area)
- Regional District of Central Okanagan
- Regional District of Comox-Strathcona
- Corporation of Delta
- Greater Vancouver Regional District
- Islands Trust – Saltspring Island
- City of Kelowna
- Township of Langley
- City of Penticton
- District of Pitt Meadows
- City of Surrey
- Peninsula Agricultural Commission
  - District of Saanich
  - District of Central Saanich
  - District of North Saanich
  - Town of Sidney

Achieving results

Some issues of concern to farmers that have featured in the committee's deliberations relate to urban encroachment, trespassing, the need for more education to help the public gain a better understanding of farming and the agricultural industry and problems of drainage.

"We were front and centre in taking part in the planning process for the drainage initiative that the City of Surrey has undertaken," said Michael Bose, chair of the committee and a farmer.

"In terms of encroachment, whenever we became aware of a new development that was bordering on agricultural land, we got to voice our opinion on how the City should deal with the potential [illegible] between urban and rural settings."

Though the committee technically serves in an advisory capacity, leaving it to Council to either accept or reject their advice, the Surrey committee's well-considered recommendations have almost always received the consent of the City.

> *Everyone at the table is looking from their perspective, but we all have the same goal and the goal is to promote agriculture and the use of our farmlands, which keeps us very focused.*
>
> ***Marvin Hunt,***
> ***City Council representative,***
> ***Surrey Agricultural Advisory Committee***

"The farmers are happy with the results we're getting," said Bose. "They see a different attitude in City Hall towards agriculture. I am happy with what we've accomplished."

But the Surrey work to change attitudes towards agriculture has not been limited just to the arena of municipal politics. One vehicle that the committee has used to bring all players into closer touch with farming is a yearly educational tour of areas of agricultural activity in Surrey.

"We have two full buses of government officials, politicians, bureaucrats, members of the development industry, bankers and more," said Hunt. "We take them on a tour of the agricultural elements of Surrey to see a number of farms and what is actually happening. So we're very much involved in educating the community."

British Columbia produces over 60 varieties of vegetables for commercial sale, many of which are grown by farmers in Surrey.

Agriculture is the largest industry in Surrey and the Agricultural Advisory Committee is helping to create a fertile ground for the continued growth of the sector. Its work has impacted many areas of agriculture in Surrey by effectively channeling matters of concern to the agricultural community to local government.

"Often farmers feel neglected, belittled and ignored but we're trying to address their issues," said Hunt. "The biggest thing that we've accomplished is bringing the voice of farmers to bear in the political dynamics of Surrey."

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Dave Melnychuk, Regional Agrologist, Fraser Valley, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3048, e-mail: dave.melnychuk@gems7.gov.bc.ca

Did you know?

The agricultural sector is responsible for some 263,000 jobs (2000 estimate) in British Columbia, including 33,000 in primary agriculture, 3,500 in primary fisheries, 26,000 in food processing and an additional 179,000 in the food retail and service industry.

British Columbia
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
www.gov.bc.ca/agf

Other Web Sites Worth Checking

www.landcommission.gov.bc.ca/alc

www.agr.ca

BCAC
www.bcac.bc.ca